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ABSTRACT

Because all social studies classes require competence in time and chronology concepts, a sampling of ideas that elementary social studies teachers can use to help children understand time and chronology are presented followed by a list of skills necessary to help children understand the time system, the calendar, and chronology. Examples of activities in social studies textbooks are provided. These examples include a class chart that demonstrates the rotation of the earth and how it affects time, a timeline that indicates the children's birthdates, a chart that illustrates important events in a child's family, a student-developed timeline chart showing housing from colonial days to the modern housing of today, a chart showing how things have changed over time, and a series of pictures of children of various ages. (RM)

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TIME AND CHRONOLOGY SKILLS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSES

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A lively discussion is underway in an undergraduate "methods course", Teaching Social Studies to Elementary School Children.

When the methods professor asks why is social studies seemingly such a low priority subject in so many of our elementary schools?, a hand shoots up followed by the reply . . ."in both of my field experiences, it seemed to me there wasn't anything concrete to attach the topic or lesson to. Social Studies class was oral reading time".

Another student contributes, "In my math classes, my cooperating teacher had a skill sequence that she followed very closely. Aren't there some specific social studies skills that children need to learn?"

These two student comments did not really answer the question posed by the professor, but they did direct the discussion toward the problem of identifying social studies skills for the elementary classroom.

Chase and John enumerates a lengthy list of skills that should be developed in early childhood social studies programs.[1] It is organized in two parts as follows:

Part One. Skills which are definite but shared responsibility of the social studies

1. locating information
2. organizing information
3. evaluating information
4. acquiring information through reading
5. acquiring information through listening and observing
6. communicating orally and in writing
7. interpreting pictures, charts, graphs, tables, maps, time lines
8. working with others.

The above skills are certainly important, but the point that Chase and John stress is that these skills are the shared responsibility of most elementary school subjects.

The four skills which are the major responsibility of social studies are:[2]

1. reading social studies material
2. applying problem solving and critical thinking skills to social issues
3. interpreting maps and globes
4. understanding time and chronology

When undergraduate or graduate students are asked to identify the skills which are the major responsibility of the social studies curriculum, the first response is usually "map skills".

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The skill that is rarely identified by pre-service or in-service teachers is the concept of understanding time and chronology. A social studies class is rarely taught with the absence of time or chronology concepts. Columbus reached San Salvador in 1492 or colonial life in the 18th century have little meaning to children unless they have the skills developed that help them to understand the "time" in the lesson.

The following is a list of skills necessary for children to help them understand the time system, the calendar and chronology. With such a high percentage of our social studies classes discussing time and chronology concepts, it is imperative that elementary school children demonstrate competence in these areas.

A. The Time System and the Calendar

1. Days of the week
2. Months of the year
3. Age of individual children
4. Significance of a birthday - one year older
5. Use calendar to find dates of special events
6. Associate seasons with particular months
7. Tell time by the clock
8. Approximate time differences between events
9. Time lapses (2 weeks ago)
10. Can relate to important dates (mother's birthday)
11. Can give age differences (my grandmother is 20 years older than my mother, etc.)
12. Know when school year begins, ends
13. Know how many weeks in a month
14. Know a few dates
15. Vocabulary
    a. indefinite time - long ago, before, after, past, future

B. Chronological Series of Events

1. Comprehend sequence and order - first, second, third, etc.
2. Arrange events, facts, and ideas in sequence from the picture
3. Arrange events, facts, ideas in sequence
4. Sequence of holidays
5. Age sequence of family members
6. Age does not denote size
7. Sequence of months
8. Distinguishes between decade and century
9. Distinguishes between important events and personalities
10. Relate and compare main events of American History
11. Distinguishes time differences between main explorers and early settlements
12. Comprehend meaning of A.D. and B.C.
13. Be able to use 19th and 20th century in proper relationship
14. Relate important dates of American events in 16th - 20th centuries
15. Aware of chronological sequences of early explorers to America to early settlements
16. Arrange chronological sequence of main events in history
17. Has some chronological sequences in main events of Civil War
18. Relates present day events to past causes (Civil Rights, urbanization, etc.)

Most Social Studies methods texts cite examples of activities for elementary grade teachers to use that help develop the concepts of "Time and Chronology."

William Crowder develops the "time" concept in the following example.[3]

> Develop a class chart to help demonstrate the rotation of the earth and how it affects time. The chart shows:
>
> 1. The earth turns around very fast, but we cannot feel it.
> 2. Once every 24 hours it makes one complete turn.
> 3. It moves from west to east, the same direction astronauts move when they circle the earth.
> 4. The sun does not move, though it appears to do so.
> 5. The part of the earth facing the sun has daylight. On the opposite side of the earth, it is dark.(teacher can switch off the lights and use a flashlight to show this)

The text shows other charts and illustrations relating to time zones, seasons, and years.

Another excellent resource for developing "time and chronology" is available from the National Council for the Social Studies.[4] The 33rd Yearbook, published by the NCCS also contains important information for teaching these concepts.

Chase and John, in their methods text develop an interesting activity that helps to teach the concept of "time."[5]

The teacher develops this concept using a "Time Line"that indicates the children's birthdates.

> The children are asked to arrange some events in life which are given to them on index cards. The cards do not have dates on them. They have phrases like, "my lifetime", my father's lifetime", "my grandfather's lifetime."
>
> The teacher expands this lesson to: (using cards)
>
> a. show the life of an individual and an important historical event.
> b. cards with inventors names
> c. cards with important aerospace events.

Maxine Dunfee's text discusses "time and chronology" by using a chart that illustrates "important events in my family."[6]

- 1959 my parents were married
- 1961 my brother was born
- 1963 my sister was born
- 1964 my father went to the Army
- 1967 my father came home from the Army
- 1968 my family came to this town
- 1969 I was born
- 1970 we moved into a new house

...and bring this date up to the present.

Sandra Kaplan et al, develops an excellent "time line" activities chart. [7]

- teacher provides children with long strips of paper to make their "time lines."
- the teacher asks the children to cut out pictures of houses from magazines, coloring books etc., that show housing from Colonial days to the modern housing of today.

James Smith's book discusses the creation of a "time machine." [8] The following activity begins with teaching third graders about "change."

- plan a series of questions to ask parents and grandparents to help children understand that time extends into the past and that the passing of time brings about many changes.
  Sample: 1. Where did you go to school?
  2. What games did you play when you were my age?
  3. How did you travel to other towns?
- develop a chart showing three generations of people and some changes that have occurred. Individual lists of events are put in "chronological" order and with parental help, dates added, and possible drawings with brief explanations.
- important dates(inventions such as autos, planes, jets, etc.) are added, resulting in an introduction to the Industrial Revolution. Also a shift is shown from rural population to urban population.
- the actual "time line" is a cord stretched from one corner of the classroom to another with cut outs of events, plus dates which are suspended, such as an airplane with the date of the invention. Each picture is added in its proper place as competed.
- one corner of the classroom becomes a "time machine" with dramatizations, costumes, props etc. that are used in class discussions.

Herman and Preston develop "time lines" for early grades in the following activities. [9]

1. A series of pictures of children of various ages to show their progression at intervals from birth their present age.
2. A series of pictures to show the child's daily routine, each picture depicting an event such as breakfast or arriving at school.
3. A line drawn along a lengthy stretch of chalkboard, divided to show the weeks and months of the school year. It provides the opportunity to enter words or sketches to record significant school events as they occur.
4. Rearrangement of a calendar by clipping it to make the dates of the month run in a continuous horizontal line.

Mary Roy, in her text,has developed an interesting activity for grades 4,5 and 6, that illustrate the concept of 1000 A.D. to 1500 A.D. [10]

The purpose is to acquaint children with the Americas before the history of the United States, and how these early events have contributed to our life today.

- materials: shoeboxes to make train cars, reference materials about early civilizations (Mayas, Incas, Aztecs, Pueblos etc.)
- information is collected by students and dropped into appropriate "train cars." (Aztec or Inca car)
- students complete "train" by discussing and sharing information collected in its proper order

The previous list is only a very small sample of the many interesting ideas that help develop the important concepts of "time and chronology."

Teachers should make the teaching of these concepts a high priority in their social studies classes.

For children to truly comprehend History, they must understand the concept of "time and chronology."

Notes

1. Chase, J. and John, M. "A Guide for Understanding Social Studies." Boston: Allyn-Bacon, Inc., 1978 pp. 324-325.

2. Ibid. p. 326

3. Crowder, Wm. "Persistent Problems Approach to Elementary Social Studies." Boston: Peacock Publishers Inc., 1978.

4. Fredman, K. "How to Develop Time and Chronology Skills." Washington, D.C.: National Council of Social Studies.

5. Chase and John, 1978. p. 326.

6. Dunfee, M. "Social Studies in the Real World." Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, Inc., 1978. p. 169.

7. Kaplan, S. et. al. "Change for Children: Ideas and Activities for Individualized Learning." Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing Co., Inc. 1980. p. 38.

8. Smith, J. "A Creative Teaching of Social Studies in the Elementary School." Boston: Allyn-Bacon Inc., 1979. pp 5-7.

9. Preston, and Herman, W. "Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School." New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1974. p. 319.

10. Roy, M. "Spark, A Handbook for Teachers of Elementary Social Studies." Stevensville Mass.: Educational Services Inc., 1965.